

March 16, 2009

RE: House Bill 6375, An Act Concerning Review and Termination of Certain Boards and Commissions

Dear Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am writing in opposition of eliminating programs and their governing offices that support the well-being of Connecticut such as the Commission for Children and The Children's Trust Fund. I am a Facilitator for the Parent Leadership Training Institute and an early childhood faculty member at Charter Oak State College. I also have expertise in family social policies, early childhood education quality, and early intervention. It has been my pleasure to serve on a number of committees with individuals from the Commission (as well as graduates of their parent leadership programs) who care deeply about and actively work to improve the welfare of young children and their families in CT.

However, CT is a state with many existing disparities in its population and many challenges. CT currently has a 40% child poverty rate (Per J. Gruendel, Governor's Forum on Early Childhood Sept. 2008). Connecticut additionally has the greatest educational achievement gap in the nation. How either of those statistics is acceptable to begin with in a state as wealthy as this, I do not understand. Many more of Connecticut's children will fall into poverty over the next few years. Now is not the time to cut programs which have the capacity to provide the type of expertise, attention, and prevention services which programs like the Children's Commission and Children's Trust Fund provide and can continue to provide. These bodies provide services which are unique and more highly preventive, educational and specialized than either DCF or Social Services. If eliminated it is likely that DCF and Social Services will be OVERWHELMED by the needs created by increased effects of poverty and stress. Now is simply not the time to eliminate the watch dogs for our most vulnerable citizens- the children. These children are the future employees, tax payers and leaders of CT. However, the long term effects of poverty on children are complex and broad.

What do we know about just some of the effects of poverty on children and families?

- Children are more likely to be exposed to street violence, violence in the home, and criminality
- Children are likely to experience disruptions in housing, care giving, and have poorer quality childcare
- Children's physical health and oral health are impacted both short and long term
- Children's emotional, behavioral and cognitive well-being are impacted both short and long term
- Children are more likely to perform worse on standardized tests and school report cards
- Children are more likely to be exposed to familial mental illness and substance abuse
- Children growing up in poverty are more likely to be exposed to environmental toxins and have significantly poorer nutrition needed to develop stronger immune systems and brain development

The effects of poverty are complex and wide reaching. The current economic crisis that is developing in our country will be a child and family crisis. Efforts by the Commission on Children and Children's Trust Fund help to ensure that families stay strong and do not fall through the cracks and need the help of DCF and Social Services. They create and support programs that work specifically to *prevent the kinds of effects listed above*. CT has worked HARD to establish a system of supports and preventive services for families, now is the time we need it the most, please think carefully about the safety net we have developed for our children before eliminating crucial elements of it.

Amy Watson

ECE ARC Coordinator Charter Oak State College/PLTI Facilitator

55 Paul J Manafort Dr., New Britain CT. 06053, (860) 832-3916